

## II.

## NOTES ON THE ANCIENT BURGH SEAL OF CRAIL, AND THE SEAL OF THE CHAPTER OF THE ABBEY OF COUPAR. BY A. H. MILLAR, F.S.A. Scot.

The antique instrument used for impressing the ancient burgh seal of Crail was accidentally discovered in August 1902 within an old house in that burgh. Mr James Meldrum, joiner, Crail, had purchased a ruinous tenement in Castle Street, Crail, which had at one time been used as a post office. While the house was in process of demolition the seal was found. It had been laid upon the top of the main wall, immediately under the sloping roof, evidently with the purpose of concealing it. There is a tradition that one of the old burgh seals of Crail which had been superseded was lost more than a century ago; and it is not unlikely that the apparatus now discovered is the missing seal. In any case, the right of the Town Council of Crail to this seal was indisputable. It was claimed by the town-clerk, and has been placed for safety in the charter-room of the burgh.

The seal (fig. 1) is worked on the same principle as the modern copying-press. The base consists of an oblong block of oak (very much worm-eaten) measuring 7 inches by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. On the under side and on the top of this block there are corresponding bands of iron,  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch broad, sunk flush with the surface, and running parallel with the block across its smaller measurement. The standard which holds the screw is fixed through these iron bands, and is set diagonally across the block. It stands two inches above the surface of the block, and is made of iron, ornamented in the centre by a series of small panels, each decorated with a conventional thistle. The screw which works in this standard is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in diameter, and has a deeply-cut square-faced thread. It is finished with a square bolt-head, intended to be operated by a lever, crank, or key of some kind. In the centre of the oak block there is inset the copper die or matrix for the reverse of

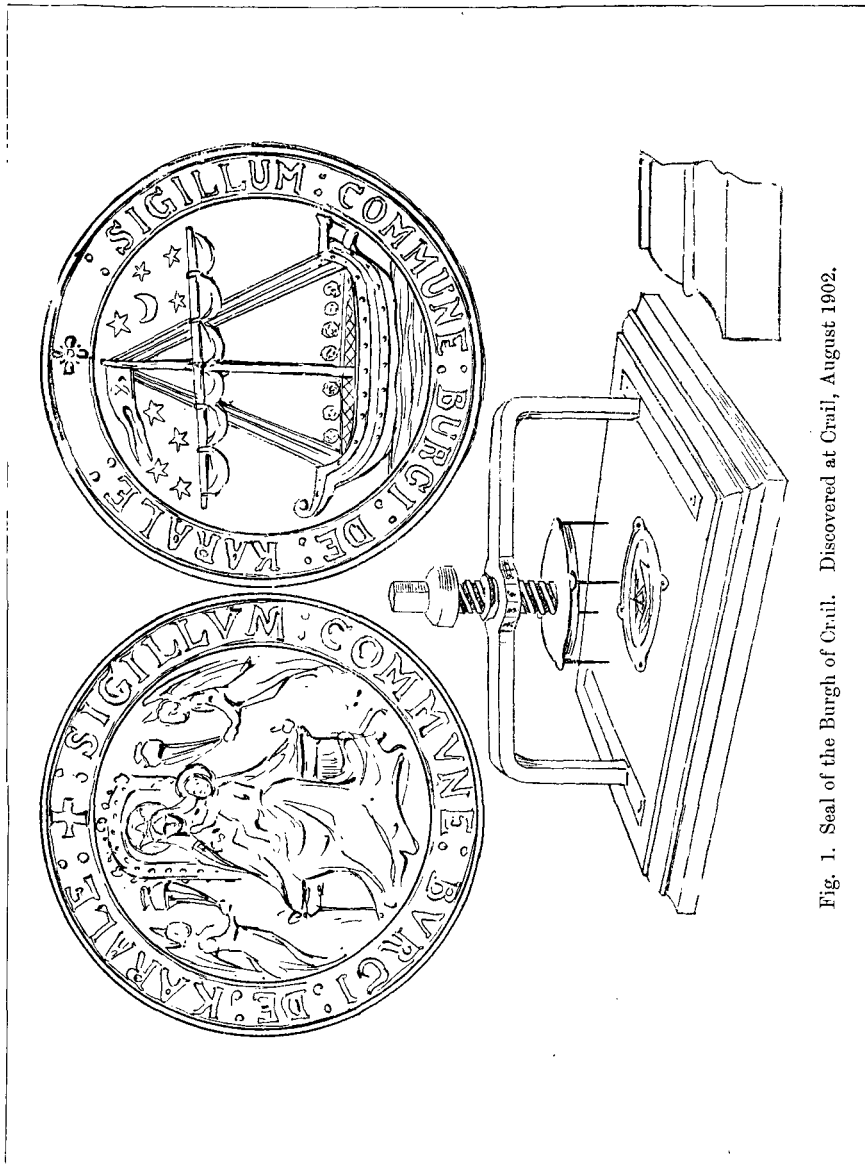


Fig. 1. Seal of the Burgh of Crail. Discovered at Crail, August 1902.

the seal. The corresponding obverse die consists of a plate of copper  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thick, with four perforations forming a square on the circle. Through these perforations four iron pins are passed, and these again are riveted into a circular iron disc, against which the screw exerts downward pressure when worked by the lever. When a double impression is to be taken, the disc with the copper die is put in position with the four pins set in corresponding holes in the block, and then the turning of the screw drives the one die towards the other, and an impression is given on the intervening wax placed between the dies. The moulding around the block shows that the apparatus is of an ancient date. The impression measures  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches within the outer enclosing circle.

The devices on the double seal of Crail are of very great interest. The obverse shows the Virgin and Child, and the reverse has a galley. The former was evidently used in pre-Reformation times, while ecclesiastical power was still exercised in the Scottish burghs. Dundee had a seal with the Virgin and Child on obverse, that was discontinued after the Reformation; so Crail, which was the site of a collegiate church of St Mary, seems to have abandoned the ecclesiastical die of the double seal, and to have used only the secular device of the galley. The legend around each of the dies is "Sigillum Commune Burgi de Karale." In my work entitled *Life: Pictorial and Historical*, the following passage refers to this seal:—

"The seal of the burgh of Crail has been in use for many centuries, and evidently suggests the early prosperity of the place as having been attributed to its maritime importance. The oldest impression of this seal known to exist is now preserved in the Chapter House at Westminster, and was appended on 26th September 1357 to the important document whereby the leading Scottish burghs became bound to supply to Edward III. the ransom demanded for David II. It is thus described:—*Obverse*—The Virgin seated on a bench with the Holy Child in her lap; an angel swings a censer on each side. *Reverse*—A large galley, clinker built, with dragon-head, one mast and large yard with close-furled sail and cordage. On deck a netting is stretched, over which six or more heads appear; a crescent in upper sinister of angle of yard."

The late Marquis of Bute, in his elaborate work entitled *The Arms of the Royal and Parliamentary Burghs of Scotland*, published in 1897,

devotes much space to the seal of Crail. He suggests that the seven figures, whose heads are shown above the gunwale of the galley, should be described as "naked mariners," the nudity of the seamen in the seal of Pittenweem being especially marked. The stars are different in number in the two seals of the burgh now used. The large seal has one star with the moon on the sinister side, and four stars on the dexter side; but the smaller seal has four stars on each side of the mast. Referring to the obverse, Lord Bute quotes from Astle and Henry Laing, also giving the above quotation from *Fife: Pictorial and Historical*. It should be noticed that the angels with censers, shown at each side of the Virgin, are swinging these censers, not in the Roman but in the French manner. This was characteristic in Scottish seals before the Reformation, and is especially noticeable in the early seal of Dundee, which bears the figures of St Mary and attendant angels. The facts that the seal now discovered corresponds in every detail with the oldest extant impression—that of 1357—and that it retains the ecclesiastical matrix, seem to indicate that it belongs to a date earlier than 1550. The matrices may have been preserved, and mounted upon the apparatus with the screw at a later date.

*Seal of the Chapter of Coupar Abbey.*—The Abbey of Coupar-in-Angus was founded by Malcolm IV. on 12th July 1164, and was occupied by Cistercian monks. According to Keith (*Catalogue of Bishops*, p. 257) this date is given by Matthew Paris, and confirmed by Angelus Manriquez, the historian of the Cistercian Order. The abbey buildings must have been of considerable extent at one time; but after the Reformation the abbey was demolished, and its stones were freely used for secular buildings in the neighbourhood. Many of the kings of Scotland were munificent benefactors of this foundation, among them being Alexander II., Robert I. and Robert II., and on several occasions the abbey was used as a royal residence, notably by Mary Queen of Scots in 1562, shortly before its demolition. Next to the kings, the Hays of Errol were the most generous donors, their gifts beginning in 1170 and continuing till the middle of the sixteenth century. William

de la Haya gave lands in the Carse of Gowrie to this abbey in 1170, and selected it as the burial-place of his descendants; and in 1585 the seventh Earl of Errol was buried here, being the fifteenth head of the race interred in the family sepulchre. The lands were secularised after the Reformation, and on 20th December 1607 James VI. conferred them upon James Elphinstone, second son of Secretary Elphinstone, Lord Balmerinoch, with the title of Baron Coupar. He died in 1669 without issue, and the estates fell to his nephew John, third Lord Balmerinoch. Arthur, sixth Lord Balmerinoch, was executed as a rebel in 1746, and the estates were forfeited to the Crown.

Henry Laing, in his *Catalogue of Seals*, describes an impression from the Seal of the Chapter of Coupar Abbey, which he found in the possession of the late Sir James Gibson Carmichael about sixty years ago. The following is Laing's description:—

“Seal of the Chapter of the Abbey of Coupar-in-Angus:—A rich design. Within a Gothic niche a figure of the Virgin, sitting, holding in her right hand a branch of lilies, and her left hand supporting the infant Jesus, standing on the seat beside her; in the lower part of the seal, within an arched niche, an Abbot in front, with a crozier, kneeling at prayer; at the sides of the niche are two shields, the dexter one bearing the arms of Scotland, the sinister, three escutcheons, being the bearings of Hay. Inscription around seal:—‘S. Comune Capitulli Mon. de Cupro.’ Common Seal of the Chapter of the Monastery of Coupar. The date of the impression is A.D. 1532.”

This is the only description of the seal by an expert with which I am acquainted. In October 1902 Mr Richard Morrison, dealer in antiquities, Dundee, brought to me for inspection a brass seal which I was able to identify as the Capitular Seal of Coupar Abbey. It is an oval or vesica seal (fig. 2) made of brass, the face measuring  $1\frac{2}{16}$  inches by  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches. The matrix in every way corresponds with Laing's description, the only dubious part being the kneeling abbot between the two shields, which requires very close examination. The seal block is surmounted by a figure of the crowned Virgin holding the infant Jesus in her arms, the figure being cast in brass so as to form the handle of the seal. The total height of this figure is  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches, and its greatest

breadth is  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches. About twenty years ago the seal was in the collection of the late Mr G. B. Simpson, Dundee. From him it passed to the



Fig. 2. Seal of the Chapter of Coupar Abbey.

late Mr C. C. Maxwell, Dundee, at whose sale in 1901 it was purchased by Mr Richard Morrison. In October 1902 the seal was acquired by Lady Abercromby, Camperdown House, Dundee.

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